

## **Appendix II**

# **National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health**

## **LATEX ALLERGY**

**June 1997**

### **What Is Latex Allergy?**

Latex allergy can result from repeated exposures to proteins in natural rubber latex through skin contact or inhalation. Reactions usually begin within minutes of exposure to latex, but they can occur hours later and can produce various symptoms. These include skin rash and inflammation, respiratory irritation, asthma, and in rare cases shock. In some instances, sensitized employees have experienced reactions so severe that they impeded the worker's ability to continue working in their current job.

The amount of exposure needed to sensitize individuals to natural rubber latex is not known, but reductions in exposure to latex proteins have been reported to be associated with decreased sensitization and symptoms. People at increased risk for developing latex allergy include workers with ongoing latex exposure, persons with a tendency to have multiple allergic conditions, and persons with spina bifida. Latex allergy is also associated with allergies to certain foods such as avocados, potatoes, bananas, tomatoes, chestnuts, kiwi fruit, and papaya.

### **How Large a Problem is Latex Allergy?**

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Reports of work-related allergic reactions to latex have increased in recent years, especially among employees in the growing health-care industry, where latex gloves are widely used to prevent exposure to infectious agents. At least 7.7 million people are employed in the health-care industry in the U.S. Once sensitized, workers may go on to experience the effects of latex allergy. Studies indicate that 8-12% of health-care workers regularly exposed to latex are sensitized, compared with 1-6% of the general population, although total numbers of exposed workers are not known. In the health-care industry, workers at risk of latex allergy from ongoing latex exposure include physicians, nurses, aides, dentists, dental hygienists, operating room employees, laboratory technicians, and housekeeping personnel.

Workers who use gloves less frequently, such as law enforcement personnel, ambulance attendants, fire fighters, food service employees, painters, gardeners, housekeeping personnel outside the health-care industry, and funeral home employees, also may develop latex allergy. Workers in factories where natural rubber latex products are manufactured or used also may be affected.

### **Prevention**

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) recommends wherever feasible the selection of products and implementation of work practices that reduce the risk of allergic reactions. These recommendations include:

1. Use nonlatex gloves for activities that are not likely to involve contact with infectious materials (food preparation, routine housekeeping, maintenance, etc.).

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2. Appropriate barrier protection is necessary when handling infectious materials. If you choose latex gloves, use powder-free gloves with reduced protein content.

3. When wearing latex gloves, do not use oil-based hand creams or lotions unless they have been shown to reduce latex-related problems.

4. Frequently clean work areas contaminated with latex dust (upholstery, carpets, ventilation ducts, and plenums).

5. Frequently change the ventilation filters and vacuum bags used in latex-contaminated areas.

6. Learn to recognize the symptoms of latex allergy: skin rashes; hives; flushing; itching; nasal, eye, or sinus symptoms; asthma; and shock.

7. If you develop symptoms of latex allergy, avoid direct contact with latex gloves and products until you can see a physician experienced in treating latex allergy.

8. If you have latex allergy, consult your physician regarding the following precautions:

Avoid contact with latex gloves and products.

Avoid areas where you might inhale the powder from latex gloves worn by others.

Tell your employers, physicians, nurses, and dentists that you have latex allergy.

Wear a medical alert bracelet.

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9. Take advantage of latex allergy education and training provided by your employer.

### Additional Information

NIOSH has issued an Alert, *Preventing Allergic Reactions to Natural Rubber Latex in the Workplace* (DHHS [NIOSH] Publication No. 97-135), that summarizes the existing data on latex allergy. Copies are available free-of-charge from the NIOSH Publications Office while supplies last:

fax 513-533-8573  
telephone **1-800-35-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674)**  
fax 513-533-8573

For a complete listing of documents available on the **CDC Fax Information Service** call **1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299)** and request document #000006. This information is also available on the Internet at CDC's web site.

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